UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

2013 Status of Telework in the Federal Government

Report to the Congress

a New Day for Federal Service

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
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Message from the Director – 2013 Status of Telework in the Federal Government

I am pleased to present the 2013 Status of Telework in the Federal Government. This report is the second since the signing of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010. It gives an overview of the Federal Government's expanding and successful use of telework for achieving agency missions and goals.

Ultimately, we want agencies to use telework strategically to drive results: ensuring continuity of operations, reducing management costs, improving our employees' ability to balance their work and life commitments, and increasing accountability for achieving individual work results.

The report shows that a growing number of agencies do use telework as a strategic tool. For example, this year more agencies have set goals to increase retention, improve employee performance, and maintain emergency preparedness through telework.

Agencies have met essential implementation requirements for telework in the Act, and have initiated increasingly sophisticated ways of promoting programs, setting goals, and measuring outcomes. The report provides insights into agency practices for setting and measuring telework goals for energy use, emergency preparedness, retention and others. It also includes examples of agency management efforts to promote telework.

Assessment of Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data shows that telework continues to be associated with greater accountability, job satisfaction, and empowerment. In comparison to those employees who face barriers to telework, fewer teleworkers intend to leave their agencies for a new position, and more teleworkers report feeling accountable for achieving results and would recommend their place of work to others.

The vast majority of agencies have adopted telework as a critical component of their agency Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP). Use of telework in this capacity will enable our Federal organizations to continue functioning through hazardous weather, pandemic, physical attacks or any other event that would result in the closure of Government buildings.

While we have made significant strides in realizing the strategic benefits of telework, management resistance continues to present a barrier to participation. Tight budgets also constrain some agencies from providing the information technology and security needed to expand telework.

Overall, the use of telework is expanding and improving in the Federal Government. Through the use of telework, agencies are poised to achieve significant cost savings while meeting goals, achieving mission, and serving the American people.

Katherine Archuleta

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Executive Summary

As demonstrated in this second U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) status report under the Telework Enhancement Act (the Act), the utility of telework as a strategic organizational change program is increasingly appreciated within the Federal Government. Reported results clearly illustrate a growing Governmentwide commitment to incorporating telework as a standard practice as agencies continue to diligently refine and improve the implementation of telework.

Study results generally show that agencies have implemented solid programs and a growing number of agencies have embraced the potential for the organization-wide benefits offered by telework. Managers of telework programs have begun to advance telework through more sophisticated approaches to program development. Findings overall indicate advances in both satisfaction of Act requirements and participation in telework during the intervening year since the first report under the Telework Enhancement Act:

- The number of employees deemed eligible for teleworking increased by 49 percent;
- The number of employees with telework agreements increased by 84 percent; and,
- The number of employees who teleworked in a September-to-September snapshot increased by 24 percent.

Not only are more employees participating, but managers of telework programs have begun to advance telework through more sophisticated approaches to program development. Importantly, and in contrast to findings of the last status report, a growing number of agencies have demonstrated the capability to set and advance agency outcome goals for telework, including critical employee attitude, emergency preparedness, and cost goals.

About the Research

Telework is an important tool for achieving a resilient and results-oriented workforce. To understand the state of Federal telework and its role in agency performance, it is important to understand the extent of telework, as well as perspectives of teleworkers and their employers. To provide a robust picture of telework under the Act, this report draws upon research engaging complementary methods and perspectives – with agency perspectives provided in the Data Call and employee perspectives captured through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

The annual agency Data Call (Call) issued by OPM provides the core data for the report. The Call was updated in 2012 to reflect program advancements, with new questions to understand, for example, how agencies update telework agreements, revise eligibility criteria, and report progress towards satisfying established agency goals. More similarities between the 2011 and 2012 Call allow for the first comparative analysis under the Act regarding important agency program features, such as program implementation strategies, rates of employee participation, and goal setting processes.

Results of comparative analysis of data from the 2011 and 2012 Federal Employee Viewpoint Surveys are also included in this report. Comparisons allow some insights into teleworker attitude and behavior trends important to agency performance, such as employee attraction, satisfaction, and retention. Findings also provide an opportunity to assess indicators of program success through assessment of employee satisfaction with telework programs.

Telework Program Implementation

Federal Agencies have continued to make progress in satisfying Act requirements. The status of telework program implementation is summarized here according to requirements outlined in the Act:

- Establish a policy under which eligible employees would be allowed to telework. In 2012, 76 percent of responding agencies reported that they have established a policy pursuant to the requirements of the Act (up from 70 percent in 2011). Internal review processes and unresolved policy questions have meant that a few agencies are still working to adopt telework policies aligned with the Act, even two years from signing of the Act.

- Designate a Telework Managing Officer (TMO). All respondent agencies covered under the Act maintained either a permanent or acting TMO in 2012 (98 percent). Those agencies that have not maintained a TMO were not subject to Act requirements.

- Determine eligibility and notify all employees of their eligibility to telework. All reporting Executive branch agencies have notified agency employees of their eligibility to participate in telework (88 percent) or engaged in an ongoing process to do so. At the time of data collection, a total of 1,020,034 employees, or 47 percent of the employee population, had been determined eligible to telework. The reported eligibility rate represents a 49 percent increase from the previous year. Eligibility determinations are not a one time exercise, but constantly evolve based upon hiring, changes in work tasks and other factors. Ninety-two percent of agencies reported making appropriate updates to eligibility.

- Require a written agreement between an agency manager and each of his/ her employees authorized to telework. In 2012, the 81 agencies that maintained records of telework agreements reported a total of 267,227 Federal employees with agreements in place, an 84 percent increase from 2011 when 82 agencies reported 144,851 employees with agreements. As before, most agencies in 2012 reported that they renew telework agreements periodically according to a fixed schedule (e.g., at the same time as the performance appraisal), with a change in supervisor, and/or whenever an employee's position changes.

- Ensure that an interactive training program is provided to eligible employees and their managers and that the training is successfully completed by employees prior to entering into a telework agreement (unless specifically waived by the head of the agency). As in 2011, the most frequently listed source of training for both employees and managers in 2012 was the web-based telework training available through OPM (www.telework.gov). About a quarter of reporting agencies developed their own customized in-person training.

- Adopt telework as a part of the agency's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). The relationship between telework and emergency preparedness policies was considered in detail in the 2012 Data Call, and most agencies reported inclusion of telework in their emergency preparedness policies. Eighty-one percent of agencies included information regarding the use of telework during emergencies in their telework policies. Showing a marked increase, 46 percent of agencies report that teleworkers are given specific training about what is expected of them in an emergency (up from 34 percent in 2011). Nearly twice the percentage of agencies in 2012 as in 2011 conduct exercises to help employees gain experience with teleworking in an emergency.

Telework and Technology Support

Inadequate technology and data security issues are often cited as critical barriers to telework. Consequently, the Call included questions to assess technology implementation. Asked to identify how teleworkers access work-related equipment, agencies were roughly split between providing equipment to teleworkers, requiring teleworkers to equip themselves, and sharing costs with employees. As in 2011, more agencies bear the cost of equipment rather than pay for services to support telework (e.g., internet). Agencies report that steps are routinely taken to ensure data security.

Telework Participation

The first Data Call under the Act asked agencies to report participation and frequency during September 2011 to capture the most representative snapshot of telework possible following satisfaction of initial requirements. To allow comparison with 2011 data, the 2012 Call again asked agencies to provide data for this same focused timeframe. To facilitate future data comparisons, agencies were also asked to provide telework participation and frequency data for the entire Fiscal Year 2012.

Of note, some agencies were able to report data only for either the September timeframe or the entire fiscal year. Additionally, since a substantially greater number of employees were deemed eligible in 2012, overall participation rates may appear smaller, despite an increase in the raw numbers. Participation highlights are encouraging as summarized in the table.

	2012		2011	
	Number of employees	Number of agencies responding	Number of employees	Number of agencies responding
Total number of employees	2,157,668	88	2,165,390	86
Employees deemed eligible to telework	1,020,034	83	684,589	82
Employees with telework agreements	267,227	81	144,851	82
Employees Teleworking in September	209,192	79	168,558	87
Employees Teleworking in Fiscal Year 2012	301,372	75	--	--

Bulleted information highlights telework participation trends based upon tabled findings.

- The number of eligible employees, the number of employees with telework agreements, and the September telework participation rate all increased since 2011.
- As a percentage of all Federal employees, telework increased from 8 percent to 10 percent between September 2011 and September 2012.
- When looking at the entire Fiscal Year 2012, 14 percent of all Federal employees teleworked to some degree.
- The portion of all Federal employees deemed eligible to telework increased by 49 percent between 2011 and 2012.
- Thirty percent of eligible employees did telework at some point during Fiscal Year 2012; during September only, agency records show that 21 percent of eligible employees teleworked.

How Often Do Employees Telework?

Understanding the frequency with which Federal employees engage in telework has practical significance beyond simply satisfying Act requirements. Relatively infrequent telework (e.g., monthly) may achieve some telework goals, such as emergency preparedness. However, telework must occur with greater frequency to achieve other goals, including reduced energy and space costs. Data from 2012 indicate that telework has become both more widespread and more frequent since 2011.